

WINTER SOUTHERN ARIZONA

JANUARY 26-31, 2008

**LEADERS:
BARRY ZIMMER AND STEVE HILTY**

COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

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Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Steve Hilty

Our 2008 Winter Southern Arizona tour combined a great list of rarities with superb views of many southwestern specialties. The day we ventured north to the Casa Grande area and the nearby Santa Cruz flats was perhaps our best. A golf course in western Casa Grande had been hosting an adult Northern Jacana for several weeks prior to our arrival, so we made searching for this accidental U.S. visitor a top priority. Upon arrival, we were temporarily sidetracked by an almost equally rare Long-tailed Duck, a Vermilion Flycatcher, and several striking Cinnamon Teal among others. Finally, after a tense 15–20 minutes, Steve spotted the jacana hunkered under some brush on the south end of one of the ponds. The bird flew across the pond, landing in full view, and began feeding along the open shoreline. We had incredible scope views of this tropical bird from about 40 feet. Its presence with a Long-tailed Duck from the Arctic on the same pond made quite an unusual combination!

From Casa Grande we headed southeast to the Santa Cruz flats. A Sage Sparrow that was spotted along the roadside put on an amazing show in the open for several minutes. A few minutes later, a very responsive Bendire's Thrasher gave us walkaway views. Our next target was the declining Mountain Plover. This area hosts small numbers of Mountain Plovers each winter, but they can be devilishly hard to find in the countless square miles of sod farms and dirt fields. We had great luck finding a group of four in one of the first fields we checked, and savored lengthy scope views. A perched Prairie Falcon, a perched Merlin, a flock of 250+ Lark Buntings, two male Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and, best of all, a Ruddy Ground-Dove (another rare U.S. visitor) from about 20 feet rounded out the highlights from this area.

Late afternoon was reserved for a check of the Sweetwater wetlands in northwest Tucson. When we arrived a stunning Harris's Hawk was sitting atop a telephone pole dining on a Mourning Dove. The late afternoon light accentuated the beautiful chestnut shoulders and thighs. A Sora walked into full view as we began circling the ponds. More Cinnamon Teal and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a pair of Abert's Towhees, and a dazzling male Anna's Hummingbird topped off the day. That night we pondered how the combination of Northern Jacana, Long-tailed Duck, Ruddy Ground-Dove, and Mountain Plover in the same day had probably never been duplicated in birding history!

Of course, this was but one day of our exciting trip. Our first day was spent in the vicinity of Madera Canyon, which produced superb views of Arizona Woodpecker, Magnificent Hummingbird, Yellow-eyed Junco, and Painted Redstart. Nearby desert locales yielded Gilded Flicker, Rufous-winged Sparrow, and a stunning male Lawrence's Goldfinch.

Montosa Canyon produced yet another rarity with a Black-capped Gnatcatcher, great studies of a Green-tailed Towhee, and quick views of a Black-chinned Sparrow. Evening owling resulted in wonderfully close views of both Western and Whiskered screech-owls.

Another day was spent in the Sulphur Springs Valley to the east of Tucson. Raptors abound here in winter and we had an impressive 11 species for the day, including an absolutely amazing 21 Ferruginous Hawks. Apparently prey was abundant this winter, as raptor numbers were through the roof. Whitewater Draw was hosting some roosting owls and we had scope views of 8 Barn Owls, 5 Great Horned Owls, and a well-camouflaged Long-eared Owl. The Draw also produced about 10,000 Sandhill Cranes, several Vermilion Flycatchers, and Ross's and Greater White-fronted geese. Other highlights for the day included more scope views of Harris's Hawk, a Cackling Goose, incredible studies of Crissal Thrasher, and a field with 47 Mountain Plovers.

Finally, the Patagonia area provided us with Dusky and Gray flycatchers, Red-naped Sapsucker, and a dazzling pair of Hooded Mergansers.

This trip was packed with memorable moments and highly sought species. An added bonus was staying all five nights in the same hotel. I can hardly wait for next year's tour!

Itinerary:

January 26 - arrival in Tucson

January 27 - Green Valley, Continental, Madera Canyon, Montosa Canyon (64 species)

January 28 - Casa Grande, Santa Cruz flats, Redrock area, Sweetwater wetlands (81 species; 114 total)

January 29 - Rio Rico pond, Kino Springs, Patagonia, Patagonia Lake SP, Madera Canyon; evening owling (77 species; 130 total)

January 30 - Willcox, Sulphur Springs Valley to Whitewater Draw (75 species; 146 total)

January 31 - departures for home (146 species total)

Key:

T = Tucson, Sweetwater, Santa Cruz flats, Casa Grande

M = Madera Canyon, Green Valley, Montosa Canyon, Amado

N = Nogales, Patagonia area

S = Sulphur Springs Valley, Willcox

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low densities as to be easily missed

Birds:

Greater White-fronted Goose S---one at Whitewater was unexpected
Snow Goose S---about 40 at Whitewater including a blue morph
Ross's Goose S---fifteen or so in with Snows
Canada Goose S
Cackling Goose S---in with flock of four Canadas; nice comparison
Gadwall T,M,S
American Wigeon T,N,S
Mallard widespread, including some of the Mexican Duck subspecies
Blue-winged Teal T---very uncommon in winter
Cinnamon Teal T,N,S---gorgeous
Northern Shoveler widespread
Northern Pintail T,S
Green-winged Teal T,N,S
Redhead M
Ring-necked Duck M,T,N
Lesser Scaup S
Long-tailed Duck T---accidental in Arizona; great views of bird at Casa Grande
Bufflehead N
Hooded Merganser N---pair at Kino Springs
Common Merganser N
Ruddy Duck daily
Wild Turkey M---flock of eight very tame birds at Madera Canyon Lodge feeders
Gambel's Quail M,T,N,S
Pied-billed Grebe T,N
Eared Grebe N
Great Blue Heron T,N,S
Great Egret T,N
Green Heron T
Black Vulture T,N---six near Redrock were unexpected that far north
Turkey Vulture N
White-tailed Kite S---rare
Northern Harrier almost daily
Sharp-shinned Hawk M,T
Cooper's Hawk daily, with 13 our day in Sulphur Springs Valley
Harris's Hawk T,S---great scope study at Sweetwater & Willcox
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily with a high count of 135 in one day!
Ferruginous Hawk S---a good year for this species with an astonishing 21 seen in one day;
wonderful Questar views
American Kestrel seen daily in numbers
Merlin T,S---three total
Peregrine Falcon M,T---our first bird of the tour!
Prairie Falcon T---thanks to Ed
Sora T---superb views
Common Moorhen T,N
American Coot widespread
Sandhill Crane S---wonderful show of about **8000+** birds at Whitewater Draw

Northern Jacana T---after some effort we had unbelievable views of adult bird wintering at Casa Grande golf course; only a handful of previous records for Arizona; voted the favorite bird of the tour

Killdeer T,S

Mountain Plover T,S---good views of four in the Santa cruz flats and distant views of 47 in Sulphur Springs valley; easily missed entirely

Black-necked Stilt S

Spotted Sandpiper S

Greater Yellowlegs S

Long-billed Curlew S

Rock Pigeon seen daily

Eurasian Collared-Dove T,N,S---this rapidly invading species seems to be everywhere now

White-winged Dove M,T,N---uncommon in winter

Mourning Dove seen daily

Inca Dove T,S

Ruddy Ground-Dove T---great studies of a female near Redrock; a real bonus!

Greater Roadrunner M,S---about four total

Barn Owl S---great study of roosting birds (8)

Western Screech-Owl M---very responsive bird for late winter; tied for second favorite bird of the tour

Whiskered Screech-Owl M---fantastic views, especially for midwinter

Great Horned Owl S---five seen in one day, our first thanks to Marilyn

Long-eared Owl S---one well hidden bird roosting at Whitewater Draw was a surprise; tied for second favorite bird of the tour

White-throated Swift N---good views over Patagonia Lake

Magnificent Hummingbird M---three in Madera

Anna's Hummingbird T,N---particularly well at Sweetwater

Belted Kingfisher T

Acorn Woodpecker M,N

Gila Woodpecker M,T,N

Red-naped Sapsucker N

Ladder-backed Woodpecker M,T,N,S---exceptional views below Madera

Arizona Woodpecker M---uncommon; super views of male at feeder

Northern Flicker daily---Red-shafted form

Gilded Flicker M---cooperative pair in Green Valley

Dusky Flycatcher N---one at Patagonia Lake; easily missed

Gray Flycatcher N,S---unusual was one at Whitewater Draw

Black Phoebe T,N,S

Say's Phoebe daily

Vermilion Flycatcher T,S---stunning males; tied for second favorite bird of the tour

Loggerhead Shrike seen daily

Plumbeous Vireo N---nice looks at one at Kino Springs; rare in winter

Hutton's Vireo M---within a few feet!

Western Scrub-Jay M,Texas Canyon---*woodhouseii*

Mexican Jay M

Chihuahuan Raven S

Common Raven daily

Horned Lark T,S

Bridled Titmouse M,N---great looks

Verdin M,T,N
Red-breasted Nuthatch M---irregular invader
 White-breasted Nuthatch M,N
 Cactus Wren M,T
 Rock Wren M
 Canyon Wren M---heard only in Montosa Canyon
 Bewick's Wren N---incredibly, only one seen
 Marsh Wren T,N---seen very well at Patagonia Lake
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet M,T,N
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher T---one at Sweetwater
Black-capped Gnatcatcher M---one seen briefly in Montosa Canyon; very rare
 Hermit Thrush M,N
 American Robin M---a grand total of one seen
 Northern Mockingbird M,N
Bendire's Thrasher T---cooperative bird in the Santa Cruz flats
 Curve-billed Thrasher M,N,S---the western *palmeri* subspecies!
 Crissal Thrasher M,S---fantastic scope views
 European Starling seen daily
 American Pipit T,S
 Phainopepla M,N
 Orange-crowned Warbler T,N---especially well at Kino Springs
 Yellow-rumped Warbler seen daily; Audubon's subspecies
Black-throated Gray Warbler M---glimpsed by a few and heard only by others; rare in winter
 Common Yellowthroat T
Painted Redstart M---nice views in Madera
 Green-tailed Towhee M---excellent study
 Spotted Towhee M
 Canyon Towhee M,S
 Abert's Towhee T
 Rufous-winged Sparrow M---great looks at this very localized species
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow M---also excellent views
 Chipping Sparrow N
 Brewer's Sparrow M,T,S---not very numerous this winter
Black-chinned Sparrow M---one very briefly in Montosa Canyon was seen by some
 Vesper Sparrow T,S
 Black-throated Sparrow M,S---the most handsome sparrow?
Sage Sparrow T---best views ever of the interior race *nevadensis*
 Lark Bunting T,S---a good year for this irregular winterer; one flock of about 250 birds!
 Savannah Sparrow T,N,S
 Song Sparrow T,N,S---southwestern race *saltonis*
 Lincoln's Sparrow T,S---a few brief views
 White-crowned Sparrow seen daily
 Dark-eyed Junco M,T,N---Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed varieties
 Yellow-eyed Junco M---great views
 Northern Cardinal M,N---the brighter, longer-crested race of Arizona
 Pyrrhuloxia N,S---scarcer than usual with only seven total
 Red-winged Blackbird T,N,S
 Western Meadowlark T,N,S
 Yellow-headed Blackbird T

Brewer's Blackbird T,S
 Great-tailed Grackle daily
 Brown-headed Cowbird T,N,S
 House Finch daily
 Pine Siskin M
 Lesser Goldfinch M,T,N
Lawrence's Goldfinch M---missed more often than seen on this trip, but we had great scope views
 of one male in Continental
 House Sparrow daily

total species - 146

Transition Day list (birds seen on drive between California & Arizona---largely a travel day);

Canvasback	Common Raven
Redhead	Horned Lark
Ring-necked Duck	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Great Egret	Northern Mockingbird
Turkey Vulture	<u>Le Conte's Thrasher</u> ---not to be expected,
Northern Harrier	though always possible, on transfer day
Red-tailed Hawk	European Starling
American Kestrel	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Summer Tanager ---extremely rare in winter
Rock Pigeon	White-crowned Sparrow
Eurasian Collared-Dove	Dark-eyed Junco
Mourning Dove	Great-tailed Grackle
Anna's Hummingbird	House Finch
Gila Woodpecker	House Sparrow
Say's Phoebe	
Loggerhead Shrike	

total species - 29

Mammals:

Rock Squirrel
 Harris's Antelope Squirrel
 Arizona Gray Squirrel
 Desert Cottontail
 Coyote
 White-tailed Deer

total species - 6

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Red-eared Slider

Significant others:

Black Widow Spider
 the owling / sheriff incident